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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/06/2029  
TAGS: [ASEC](#)

SUBJECT: AGGRESSIVE AND UNUSUAL SARG SURVEILLANCE  
OF EMBOFF AND VISITING  
MEPI  
PROGRAM OFFICER

REF: A. DAMASCUS 433  
[1](#)B. DAMASCUS 534

Classified By: RSO Assiya Ashraf-Miller for reason 1.4 (g)

[1](#)1. (S/NF) SUMMARY: On 08/04/09, an Embassy Political Officer and a visiting State Department officer from NEA/PI experienced aggressive static and mobile surveillance during and after their meeting with a new human rights contact at a cafe. Both officers returned to the Embassy to report the incident to the Regional Security Office and canceled their schedule of other meetings with civil society activists. Post will follow up to determine whether Syrian authorities detained and/or questioned any Syrian Embassy contacts. END SUMMARY

[1](#)2. (S/NF) On 08/04/09, Embassy Political Officer Anthony Deaton and visiting State Department officer Charles Kiamie from the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) reported aggressive static and mobile surveillance to RSO.

[1](#)3. (S/NF) Both officers had a meeting scheduled at a cafe near the Embassy at 1500 hrs with a person going by the pseudonym Saam Abraham (email: saam.abraham@gmail.com) who contributes to a pro-democratic website called the THARWA PROJECT. Kiamie had arranged the meeting through a THARWA PROJECT contact in Washington. Saam Abraham revealed to both officers his true name to be Adnan Hamdan. During the meeting at the cafe, Deaton stated he noticed two Syrian-looking males, muscular and in their thirties watching them.

[1](#)4. (S/NF) When the meeting with Hamdan concluded, the two suspicious men exited the cafe. Deaton stated Kiamie had gone to the restroom in the cafe while Deaton waited inside. Deaton noticed the two suspicious men standing outside, apparently waiting for him and Kiamie to exit the cafe. Deaton and Kiamie decided to wait inside to see if the two men would depart. Deaton stated one of the men was talking on a mobile camera phone. After the two men continued waiting for approximately 5-10 minutes, Deaton and Kiamie exited the

cafe and walked to Deaton's car and found a teenage boy standing by the car. Simultaneously, a different man hailed a taxi on the sidewalk as Deaton and Kiamie got into the car.

¶5. (S/NF) Deaton and Kiamie headed to their next meeting, scheduled at Deaton's house with leaders of a pro-democracy group called the Damascus Declaration. While driving, Deaton noticed a taxi closely following them. Deaton looped around a traffic circle, made turns in a nearby neighborhood, and used other evasive tactics but noted the taxi was still following them. Deaton then pulled off the road and came to a full stop. The taxi also came to a stop approximately 50 yards in front of them. At this point, Deaton and Kiamie decided to return to the Embassy instead of proceeding to their next meeting. Deaton stated there were two rear passengers in the taxi. One appeared to be the man who hailed the taxi at the cafe and another appeared to be a different male.

¶6. (S/NF) Deaton parked his car near the Embassy. He noticed the taxi had stopped at the corner and then rolled backwards, out of visual range. Deaton and Kiamie stated a different man started following them by foot towards the Embassy. Deaton stated this man seemed to have exited the taxi that had followed them. The man was also speaking on a mobile phone. Deaton added he had seen this particular man earlier standing outside of the cafe where the incident began.

¶7. (S/NF) Kiamie informed RSO he arrived in Damascus from Amman (his origin was Beirut) that same morning and was departing the same night for Amman onward to Tel Aviv. Kiamie stated when he arrived at the Damascus airport, customs officials were insisting to inspect his briefcase. The Embassy expediter argued with the customs official, who eventually let Kiamie proceed without inspection. Kiamie was

traveling with a US diplomatic passport.

¶8. (S/NF) COMMENT: We have heard recent reports from Syrian contacts whom the SARG detained and questioned about their affiliation with MEPI and named American individuals associated with MEPI projects in Syria (reftels). Post is waiting to inquire discretely whether any Syrians with whom Kiamie and Deaton met or planned to meet were detained for questioning. END COMMENT.

¶9. (S/NF) RSO COMMENT: The aggressive and unsubtle surveillance described above is rare for American diplomats in Damascus but not unprecedented for Embosffs meeting with civil society contacts. The SARG is possibly cracking down hard on human rights activists and appeared to have suspected that MEPI Officer Charles Kiamie would be meeting with Syrians who are active in promoting democratic reforms. RSO assesses the SARG wanted both officers to know they were being watched and were keying especially on Kiamie and his activities and meetings while in Damascus. Kiamie is Lebanese-American and an Arabic speaker, which may also have triggered interest from the security services. The unusual airport incident further corroborates the SARG's interest in Kiamie, since Syrian Customs normally permit US diplomatic passport holders through without asking to inspect carry-on items. GRPO and Front Office were informed. Kiamie departed Damascus without further incident the same night. Embassy Political Officer Deaton will inform RSO of any further suspicious incidents. POC is RSO Assiya Ashraf-Miller. END RSO COMMENT.

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